TRANSCRIPT—JAMIE AGER

Fairview Community History Project

Interviewee: Jamie Ager

Interviewer: Tealey Ellis and Judith Robertson

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TE: Hold on a second and make sure you smile nice and pretty. Hold on. There we go. All right, let me take a look. Are you satisfied with that?

JA: Yeah.

TE: Okay, good. I'll forward that on to Jaime [McDowell, Librarian at Fairview Library] for her files then in a minute.

All right, we ready? My name is Tealey Ellis, a volunteer with Fairview, North Carolina Public Library Oral History project. Today is Thursday, June 28th, 2018, and I'm interviewing Jamie Ager at the Fairview Public Library location. Thank you, Jamie, for volunteering to share your experiences and thoughts of living and growing up in Fairview.

JR: I'm Judith Robertson in the Fairview Oral History project. The project is part of the North Carolina Room Special Collections at Pack Memorial Library. The North Carolina

Room's mission is to collect, preserve, and provide access to the history of Buncombe County and the surrounding area. Items in the North Carolina Room include paper items such as photos, postcards, manuscripts, maps, and the like, as well as recorded oral histories of folks like you. All the recordings made and historical materials collected for this project will become part of the permanent collection of Pack Library. Your interview will be transcribed with your permission and preserved for anyone interested in local history as well as for future generations. With your permission, the transcript will also be added to our online database. Documents of all types, including photos and letters, will be stored in our climate controlled storage area. They will also be scanned, so there will be a digital copy in the computer.

If you prefer to keep the documents, they can be scanned and returned to you. Our goal is to find missing pieces of information and to record your first-person narrative regarding your experiences living in Fairview. This is Judith Robertson reporting the oral history of Jamie Ager at the Fairview Library at 10:40 on June the 27th-

TE: Eighth.

JA: Eighth.

JR: ... 28th. Sorry about that. 2018 for the Fairview Oral History Project for the North Carolina room at Pack Library in the Buncombe County Library System. The conditions of use form for sound and video recordings has been signed by the interviewee.

TE: Jamie, where were you born?

JA: I was actually born in Fletcher, but lived my entire life here in Fairview.

TE: Okay. At the hospital?

JA: Uh-huh.

TE: What was the hospital?

JA: I think it was like Fletcher... I can't remember the name of it. It's on my birth certificate. But it's the hospital over in Fletcher-

JR: Seventh Day Adventist?

JA: Yeah. What is that one called nowadays?

TE: Pardee?

JA: Is it Parkway? Park Ridge.

TE: Pardee?

JR: Park Ridge.

TE: Park Ridge. Okay.

JA: Park Ridge. Yeah.

TE: Okay. All right. Tell us your parents' names and where they were born.

JA: My mother's name is Annie Ager. She was born here in Fairview. And my father's name is John Ager and he was born in Atlanta, Georgia.

TE: Okay. And what about your grandparents' names and where they were born?

JA: My grandparents were Jamie Clarke. He was from Manchester, Vermont. And then my grandmother was Elspeth Clarke, who was born here in Fairview.

TE: Okay.

JA: And my father's side... Do I need to say that side too?

TE: Yes.

JA: John Ager, his father was John Ager too, was born in Alabama. I don't know exactly where. It was in rural Alabama. And then his wife, my grandmother, Mary Peterson Ager, I believe she was born in New Jersey.

TE: Okay. How would you describe what kind of work your parents did?

JA: My parents... For professionally?

TE: Yes.

JA: Okay. We have a farm, Hickory Nut Gap Farm here, and so my mother and father have both been involved with that for their entire professional careers. In addition to that, my father ran the James GK McClure Development fund that was based out of Fairview and Asheville. And then my mother has always been on the farm.

TE: Okay. You were born in Fletcher, but have lived in the Fairview area all your life. Why did you choose to stay?

JA: I love the farm. I love... Fairview's a great community to be in and I really enjoyed being a child, getting to be raised on the farm. And when you're a young kid, you don't really love it as much as you-

TE: Might be little bit-

JA: Because hard work is not necessarily the ideal thing. You don't really come to value that as much as you wanted. I grew up working on the farm through high school and I did enjoy it a lot, but by the time I was in high school. And then I went to Warren Wilson College over here in Swannanoa and worked on the farm over there and got more interested in agriculture and the ideas behind it and how we can... Different ways to market and things like that, so that was an exciting time.

TE: So, college was when you made that decision-

JA: Cemented.

TE: Yeah.

JA: Yeah, for sure.

TE: That you wanted to farm and stay on the farm?

JA: Mm-hmm.

TE: Based on early memories of working on the farm and to where you are now, how would you describe those changes?

JA: Well, as a child, we had a dairy farm, so I always remember it being hard to make any money and kind of frustrating. And to some degree, that's agriculture in a way that you're having to really work with the land, with nature, with all the factors that you have to consider. It's not just you show up in the morning and you go home at the end of the day and the job is done. It's a much more dynamic, potentially frustrating experience if

you're not paying attention to that. So, I feel like nowadays we have built a little bit more security into the farm. We were able to not have as much financial strain as we did as children. And then we are able to participate in a type of agriculture that is not just locked into commodity pricing, which is different than most farmers are in, because most farmers... Consumer behavior has driven farmers into an economic paradigm where the only incentive they have is to grow it for cheap.

TE: Right.

JA: And the cheaper they grow it, the better they win because it's a commodity. They don't know what their price is going to be. And commodity pricing is commodity pricing. So, you're really... The only thing you can control is their cost of production. And so, you end up with these very efficient industrial models that are very efficient at producing a lot of product for very cheaply, but potentially may have other problems that are environmentally focused or welfare concerns for the animals, these types of things. And so, it's nice to be able to have a relationship directly with the customer who you can build trust with and say, "Hey, this is the way we're trying to do it. If you want to try it in a way that's not just low cost then-

TE: Then here's a way.

JA: ... that's great." Yeah. So, it's nice to have an actual customer you can look in the eye, whereas most farmers have to just produce it for cheap.

TE: Right. Do you have children?

JA: I have three boys.

TE: And their ages? As far as helping you on the farm?

JA: Cyrus is 13, Nolan is 11 and Levi is eight, and Cyrus is working on the farm this summer. And so, he's having a good time with that. And he's an eighth grader. He'll be in ninth grade next year.

TE: Oh cool.

JA: And so, he's working hard this summer. He got injured on Sunday with a ridiculous accident so he has some stitches on his hand so he had to take this week off, but he's enjoying it and he's proud of himself.

TE: What's his perspective at this stage, if you know?

JA: It's a little hard to read, but he did do a... He went to Evergreen Charter School in Asheville and at the end of the school year they make the eighth graders... What do they call it? A graduation panel where they had to present their entire career-

TE: Nice.

JA: ... to this point in time for 30 minutes to a panel of judges and dress up. And I learned a lot about him because it's nice to have... He talked about himself, he talked about his academic career, he talked about his extracurricular activities and where he is going to next. And so, that was four very interesting things to learn about your son.

TE: It is.

JA: And he mentioned the farm quite a bit and showed a lot of interest and said that if he doesn't make it as a professional athlete, then he'll likely come back to the farm.

TE: Well, I hope you have all that in writing somewhere.

JA: Right?

TE: What was growing up in Fairview like for you as maybe even a preteen, if you remember, but certainly teenage years?

JA: Yeah. I went to Fairview School. That was fun. In the old school with the brick school. And the year after I left, they built the new school here. So that was a while ago now. I guess that was probably built that new school, must have been 27 years ago. Because I was probably 12. I'm 40 now, so I was probably 12 whenever I left Fairview School. And it was good. The school was full of parents. The teachers were also folks in the community that I saw around. And that was nice. And I went to Fairview Christian Fellowship Church right above the library here throughout my childhood. And we had a great youth group and lots of friends and we always would hang out with all those folks. And it was a good childhood, a lot of fun. Played a lot of sports in Fairview, played basketball all growing up. I played soccer, I played baseball for Fairview. We had a lot of fun here.

TE: What was the ethnic and racial-

JA: Oh, mostly all white. Very much all white, I'd say. There're a few African Americans that would come, but it seemed like they would come and then they would go. I mean for a year or two of school, something like that. So mostly, yeah, I'd say definitely white.

TE: What do you think, during your teenage years, what was the safety factor like in Fairview, in terms of teenagers being out and about and doing things and-

JA: It felt pretty safe.

TE: Pretty safe?

JA: I don't think we had many.

TE: Yeah.

JA: I don't remember ever feeling like it was dangerous at all.

TE: What do you think now?

JA: I think it's about the same, as far as I can tell.

TE: Hadn't changed much?

JA: Yeah. I don't think it's changed much.

TE: Well that's-

JA: I mean, especially right where we are. And that's pretty much... My world's a pretty small microcosm of the greater Fairview world's. Yeah.

TE: Let's go back to farm for a minute.

JA: Okay.

TE: When you were a teenager, what were the crops?

JA: So, we've grown apples. We had the dairy that we sold when I was about 12 or 13. We had some beef cows, some sheep. My mom always had sheep. And then we raised some raspberries, stuff like that, that we would have to pick a lot of those in the

summertime. Worked a lot in the apples in the summertime. Taking care of the animals was always a big deal. And-

JR: Chickens?

JA: Chickens. We always had lots of chickens around. And so, we'd collect the eggs every day, do all that stuff. Pick the raspberries. My grandmother always grew a big garden, so we always ended up-

JR: Cabbages.

JA: ... in the garden quite a bit. Yeah, there was always a lot of peas and cabbages and those types of things.

TE: What crops are you growing?

JA: We have apples. We still grow apples. We have beef cattle. Now, we've got the cattle, they're certified organic. They're 100% grass fed. So, it's in a unique marketing opportunity there. We have hogs, we always had a few hogs, we have a lot more pigs now. We have nowadays a big blueberry.

TE: Okay.

JA: So we have u-pick blueberries, stuff like that. And then we do a corn maze and a pumpkin patch and a big agritourism thing too.

TE: What would you... Do you have a favorite memory of teenage years and working on the farm? And that's a loaded question.

JA: I think, in general, it was the relationships with your siblings and your brothers that are... You can't really build a relationship around working together. And farms present a really good opportunity for a relationship with your siblings and your fellow family members in that environment and the friends you make. We had exchange students often and they would come through and then you'd work all day and you'd hang out all night and it was a lot of fun.

TE: So yeah, a lot of nice memories, I would think.

JA: Yeah.

TE: Do you recall, in your teenage years, the additional help that might have been hired to do some work?

JA: Yeah. We had and still have a little bit, is Clarence McAbee. He was always a big person in my life who worked on the farm and Clarence, he grew up right here from McAbee Cove Road and was around a lot and was always good at fixing things and making things work better, stuff like that. And then he always smoked a lot of cigarettes. He taught us all how to smoke cigarettes. He'd then slip them to us, that was an important thing to learn how to do. Then we had a lot of exchange students around too, so that was a part of the life there. We had a lot of German students and so you always ended up... And a lot of people from the community. Mom and my grandmother, Granny, we called her Granny, they would always hire folks. And then we have the old houses there at the farm so there was always lots of painting and keeping those up, too.

TE: It's a lot of work.

JA: It takes a lot of work.

TE: Oh, that's interesting. How do you think, or do you think, that neighborhoods have changed over the years here in Fairview, in terms of maybe where people come from or relationship with neighbors?

JA: It certainly seems like people are pretty transient nowadays, and so there's a lot of new folks in the community and there probably were just beginning of that when I was a kid. It wasn't like that was a super new thing for us here. But I think as time goes on and you have more transients within the population, having somebody that's been in the same place for a long time's a really unique rare thing. And so, it's kind if interesting in that way. And so, agriculture by its very nature, roots people to the land. And so, you end up with a farming community that still kind of knows the old ways and pays attention to that. Is that the question? Does that answer the question?

TE: Yes, it does.

JA: Okay, good.

TE: Yes, it does. In terms of talking to your neighbors and knowing them.

JA: Yeah.

TE: And you still feel that that's-

JA: Yeah. I think so.

TE: Even though some of those transients may still be able-

JA: It gets a little hard sometimes. I'm like, oh there's another new person there, so you're at some point... And you've got kids and we're really in a busy stage of life with the young family.

TE: From your teenage years, what kinds of celebrations do you remember taking place in Fairview?

JA: That's a good question. The Fairview Fall Festival. The school was always a lot of fun when we were kids. I don't know. And it did make me think about this, because my wife's from Kentucky, she's from Louisville, and they have the Kentucky Derby up there and it is a very special experience for their whole... It's bonding and we don't really have something like that here. That would be nice. It seems like a cool experience that it's not just the race, it's the whole everybody's off for a couple days and they're all excited for the derby and it's this really big special thing.

TE: Maybe somebody should put together a Fairview Homecoming.

JA: There you go.

TE: And-

JA: Something like that.

TE: Something like that going on.

JA: Yeah.

TE: How did news travel in your younger life here in Fairview? Your mother talked about one way in which news traveled. And what's your perspective on that?

JA: The newspaper I think mostly, and then just word of mouth. Everybody talking to each other, but mostly the newspaper. I feel like that was the main way that people communicated. But for me, I liked the baseball scores. That was my main information seeking activity.

TE: Which newspaper?

JA: Citizen-Times.

TE: Citizen-Times?

JA: Yeah.

TE: Okay. You mentioned a while ago Clarence as kind of a character that helped you guys learn how to smoke and so forth. Any other characters in Fairview that you remember?

JA: There was a lot when I was really little, like Jim Searcy was always interesting. He worked on the farm. There were some Harris guys out of Gerton who were always a little sketchy, but they seemed to be around sometimes. Nanny was not on the farm, but she lived there at the farm in a trailer. Nanny Suttles. And she lived right below us in a trailer. And she was an old mountain woman who had a ton of TV dinners in her freezer. And mom took a special liking for Nanny and she would love for me and my brothers to come down to visit with her. And the way she got us to come down, because it wasn't always something you wanted to go see. She always had a big snuff and she would sit there and she lived alone and she was big into sweepstakes.

She thought she might win the sweepstakes, but the way she got us to come down there was with Bear Claws, the little Danish thing.

TE: Yes.

JA: So, she would have those. And then she always had Cokes and Strikes. She called Sprites Strikes, so we would go down there. So that was always a good reason to go.

TE: Oh yeah.

JA: I was like, "Well, let's go down there and get a Coke." So, she would give us all a Coke and then Beech-Nut chewing gum. And so, Nanny was a big part of my childhood. And then as soon as you came home at nighttime from somewhere you'd walk in the door and as soon as you turn the lights on, the phone would ring and it would be Nanny, "Hey. Where y'all been? Blah, blah, blah." She wanted to know what was going on.

And she died when I was in college or maybe late in high school. And we had the funeral up there at the Baptist Church up in Gerton.

TE: Okay.

JA: So, she was a neat lady. And then Rita lived in Gerton, Rita Freeman. And she was always working at the big house doing stuff and Elle Early. I don't know if you guys have heard about these people. She was a neat old lady, real cranky lady. Didn't like men with long hair. And she died maybe five or six years ago. And my wife, Amy, loved Elle and Amy would take her places and they had a good relationship. So that was a cool experience. Everybody loved Elle Early.

TE: Sounds like it.

JA: Yeah.

TE: Did you belong to any clubs like 4-H or...

JA: No, we didn't really have that as much here. There weren't that many folks involved with that kind of thing. Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts. I was in Cub Scouts and then they couldn't find... My mom was in charge of the Cub Scout group and then they couldn't find a man to be in Boy Scouts because they wouldn't let women be in charge of the Boy Scouts and so we disintegrated at that point. And then mostly just sports.

TE: Okay. What about leaders in the community? Who were some of the people that you-

JA: Well, my grandfather was in the North Carolina House and that was in the '80s so that was... We always had that leadership responsibility ingrained in us as children. And then I'd say leaders in the community, the church elders were definitely the leaders in the community, which were usually my friends' parents and stuff like that. So that was always people you looked up to. I'm trying to think who else. The school, the teachers and the principal. Ronnie Sams was the principal for a while, so that always seemed like an important person.

TE: Right. I know you mentioned some of the things that maybe you and the guys did, but recreation. Did you go into Asheville for recreational things?

JA: Yeah. It seems like most of the movies and stuff like that was in Asheville, but we had a lot of hanging out at each other's houses here. And the youth group at church, that

was the big... We'd always hang out with each other at different houses. And then just out there at home, we'd hang out there a lot too.

TE: Did you go to Reynolds High School?

JA: Mm-hmm. Reynolds High School.

TE: Okay. Did all of your siblings go to that high school and graduate from there?

JA: We did.

TE: Okay. How many siblings do you have?

JA: I have three brothers. I'm the third of four boys. Oldest brother's Eric, who is four years older than I am. And Eric ended up going to the Naval Academy out of high school and then he's been in the Navy ever since. And he's been wrapping up. He's been in Ankara, Turkey for the last three years.

TE: Oh, wow.

JA: And so, he's going to be moving to our county.

TE: Okay.

JA: So, he's Eric. And then my brother Kevin, who was born in 1975, and he lives in California, working out there. And then I'm the third of four. And then my brother, Doug Ager, who lives right here in Fairview.

TE: Lives here in Fairview,.

JA: Or he lives in Asheville, but he works in Fairview.

TE: But he works here. Other than... You mentioned church again a while ago. Other than Christianity, do you recall any other religious groups?

JA: Not much in Fairview, no. I mean, I know when somebody read... We read the history of Fairview. There was some time when Mormons had come through here, so that was interesting to learn about. But I don't remember interacting with that on a personal level.

TE: Okay.

JA: We did have some guys stay with us in high school who were from Morocco, and they were all Muslim. So that was interesting for me to learn.

TE: How long were they here?

JA: They were here for about a month.

TE: Oh, okay.

JA: And they worked on the farm with us.

TE: Working on the farm.

JA: Yeah.

TE: Okay.

JA: They were cool. I liked them.

TE: Okay. What do you think the general thought, attitude, maybe of Fairview population during war times that our country's been involved in?

JA: Like in World War II or-

TE: World War II or the-

JA: ... from my experience at the Gulf War or-

TE: Vietnam, Gulf.

JA: Yeah. I'd say it's pretty typical in that commitment to America and patriotic. And I mean, I think probably follows national trends, especially in the South, where you've got an interest in a commonality and a common mission that war brings about. And then with Vietnam, that was a split between the anti-war and the patriotic side that we're still reconciling with even today. And I think that war's not simple and easy, and sometimes it's easier for people to see things as black and white. And that in the old days, it feels like World War II for sure was a very clear good versus evil situation.

TE: Yeah. Very clear.

JA: And I think that as time moves along and information becomes more and more available, that the gray areas are hard to figure out. And so, it becomes more muddled and unclear. And that's not a very satisfying place to be.

TE: It's harder to make decisions then.

JA: And know where you land.

TE: Exactly.

JA: Yeah.

TE: If you were asked to make a television ad, or in writing that was going to be published around this country as to why someone should move to Fairview, want to live here, what do you think it would say?

JA: That's a great question. I would say it's a great place to be because you're in the mountains and beautiful, and it's a place where there are people who are interested in trying to do things right. And so that commitment and that care is real. And so that's a pretty special thing that I don't think is totally unique to Fairview, but it is certainly exists here. And then you can't beat the weather. And we are so close to a great metropolitan area.

TE: Mm-hmm. You've talked about Fairview when you were a child, a teenager, an adult person now with a large industry going on. What would be your guess, your opinion, on what Fairview might be like in 10 years?

JA: I would say it will continue to have new people move here. I don't think it'll be too different. I think it's just going to continue to have a good relationship with Asheville. It's important for the economic development of Fairview. It's nice to have a good community. I'd say one thing that's concerning is the price of everything, so expensive. And so, it's a little difficult for the old timers that have lived here forever to keep that culture alive and to really be a part of it, it's just so expensive to live here. But that said, also things change slowly.

TE: They do.

JA: And 10 years isn't very long, and so maybe 100 years, 200 years, it'll be drastically different in that way. But I think 10 years it won't be super different.

TE: That's a good thought to keep in mind.

JA: Yeah.

TE: It's one of the reasons I moved here.

JA: Yeah.

TE: Do you have anything else, topic or an area that hasn't been brought up that you would like to share? That you would like to have as on the record about your thoughts of Fairview?

JA: I can't think of much right now. I think it's a... No.

TE: Okay.

JA: That's good. Yeah.

TE: Do you have something, Judith?

JR: Yeah, I was just wondering about, do you remember when 74 was widened?

JA: Yeah.

JR: You were living here when that whole thing was going on?

JA: Yeah. Through college.

JR: Do you think that made any difference in the community? Did it-

JA: Yeah. It seemed like it definitely... It was a huge construction project, and then it certainly made it easier to get to town.

JR: Did it displace a lot of people?

JA: Not that I really remember. I mean, there were some old houses along the sides of the roads and stuff, but not on a very grand scale. Maybe there was a few specific instances that stuff like that happened, but nothing too much.

TE: Good question. And something else?

JR: That's it.

TE: Well, Jamie, thank you so much for sharing your thoughts with us today.

JA: Thank you. Glad to do it.

JR: This was terrific of you to take the time to come and talk to us.

JA: Good. Oh, I'm glad to do it. Thank y'all for doing it.

TE: Well-

JR: Great memories.

TE: Oh and-

JR: Well, and you're making them.

TE: You probably know all about...

END OF INTERVIEW.